

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 DPW-01 AID-20 OMB-01 DRC-01

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R 010945Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7618

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 17232

E.O. 11651: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MILI, VS

SUBJECT: MONTHLY I CORPS COMMANDER'S CONFERENCE

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SAIGONINFO CAN THO NHA TRANG
BIEN HOA SEP 28 REPEATED TO YOU

QUOTE DANANG 1144

1. SUMMARY: THE MONTHLY MR-1 COMMANDER'S CONFERENCE CHAIRED BY LT. GEN. NGO QUANG TRUONG WAS HELD SEPTEMBER 25. (TRUONG LEFT MR-1 SEPTEMBER 6 TO BEGIN A TEN-BKY TO TWO-WEEK VISIT TO KOREA AND TAIWAN - DANANG 1133. I CORPS FORWARD COMMANDER LT. GEN. LAM QUANG THI ASSUMED COMMAND OF MR-1 IN TRUONG'S ABSENCE, EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 27.) MR-1 INTELLIGENCE REPORTED ON RECENT NVA/VC ACTIVITIES AND CAPABILITIES AND CONCLUDED THAT THE COMMUNISTS STILL PLAN TO TRY TO TAKE OVER SOUTH VIETNAM MILITARILY, BY MEANS OF AN EVEN LARGER OFFENSIVE THAN THAT OF EASTER 1972. THIS OFFENSIVE COULD COME AT ANY TIME AFTER SPRING 1974. ALL MR-1 DIVISION COMMANDERS REPORTED ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR AREAS OF OPERATION. IN HIS CONCLUDING REMARKS GENERAL TRUONG TERMED PROGRESS IN MR-1 IN THE 3D QUARTER OF 1973 SATISFACTORY, BUT TOOK HIS COMMANDERS TO TASK FOR LACK OF INITIATIVE IN SOLVING REMAINING PROBLEMS, AND FOR
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FAILURE TO ADJUST TO THE POST-CEASEFIRE SITUATION. TRUONG

CALLED FOR LESS RELIANCE ON MATERIAL GOODS, GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES, AND NEW TACTICS TO MATCH THE NEW SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE MR-1 INTELLIGENCE OFFICER BEGAN THE CONFERENCE WITH A REVIEW OF NVA/VC ACTIVITIES. ACCORDING TO G-2, IN SEPTEMBER THE COMMUNISTS CONTINUED TO INFILTRATE PERSONNEL AND WAR MATERIAL, ESPECIALLY FOOD AND AMMUNITION. ROAD BUILDING CONTINUED. A STRONG ANTI-AIRCRAFT SYSTEM WAS ESTABLISHED ALONG HIGHWAY 14 FROM QUANG TRI TO KHAM DUC THROUGH THE ASHAU VALLEY. THE ENEMY CONTINUED TO USE LOCAL FORCES TO MAINTAIN A NUMBER OF STRONG POINTS AND TO LAUNCH LIMITED ATTACKS ON AREAS UNDER GVN CONTROL IN THUA THIEN AND QUANG NGAI. THERE WAS AN INCREASE IN TERRORIST ACTIVITIES AGAINST DENSELY POPULATED AREAS, RESETTLEMENT CENTERS, AND AGAINST GVN VILLAGE OFFICIALS. THE ENEMY CONTINUED TO RESETTLE NORTH VIETNAMESE CIVILIANS INTO MOUNTAINOUS AREAS OF MR-1. A TOTAL OF 1,200 TROOP REPLACEMENTS WERE SENT IN DURING THE MONTH, 300 OF WHOM HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO ENEMY UNITS IN NORTHERN MR-1, AND 900 TO SOUTHERN MR-1. MOST OF THE REPLACEMENTS HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO DISTRICT LOCAL UNITS, BASED ON THE FORMULA G-2 TERMED "2 NORTH VIETNAMESE, 1 SOUTH VIETNAMESE".

3. THE PRESENT ENEMY COMBAT STRENGTH IN MR-1 WAS ESTIMATED AT 98,400 MEN, BROKEN DOWN AS FOLLOWS: (A) INFANTRY: 65,400 MEN, IN SIX DIVISIONS, FIVE REGIMENTS, AND THIRTY-EIGHT INDEPENDENT BATTALIONS; (B) ARMOR: 2,000 MEN IN TWO TANK REGIMENTS AND THREE TANK BATTALIONS, WITH 345 TANKS, 230 IN NORTHERN MR-1, THE REMAINDER IN SOUTHERN MR-1; (C) ARTILLERY, 10,600 MEN IN NINE REGIMENTS AND THIRTEEN BATTALIONS; (D) ANTI-AIRCRAFT, APPROXIMATELY 20,000 MEN IN NINETEEN ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENTS.

4. ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, G-2 EXPECTED THE COMMUNISTS TO INCREASE THEIR ACTIVITIES, DIPLOMATIC AND LOCAL, TO CONSOLIDATE THE POSITION OF THE PRG. ACCORDING TO A RECENTLY CAPTURED DOCUMENT, RATHER THAN ATTACKING AND ENCIRCLING GVN MILITARY OUTPOSTS, THE COMMUNISTS ARE TO ADOPT A "NATIONAL CONCILIATION" POLICY. THEY ARE BEING INSTRUCTED TO EXPLOIT THE PROVISIONS OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT IN A WAY WHICH WILL LEAD TO THE

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"NEUTRALIZATION" OF ARVN FORCES, THUS CREATING A "LEOPARD SPOT" SITUATION IN WHICH EACH AREA WOULD HAVE "TWO SEPARATE SECTORS AND TWO SEPARATE ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITIES".

5. NEVERTHELESS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, THE COMMUNISTS STILL PLAN TO TAKE OVER SOUTH VIETNAM BY MILITARY MEANS. WHEN THE TIME IS RIPE THEY WILL LAUNCH AN EVEN LARGER OFFENSIVE THAN IN 1972. ACCORDING TO G-2, THIS OFFENSIVE

COULD BE LAUNCHED AT ANY TIME AFTER SPRING, 1974.

6. EACH DIVISION COMMANDER BRIEFED ON THE SITUATION IN HIS AREA OF OPERATIONS. THE MARINE, AIRBORNE, AND THIRD DIVISION COMMANDERS ADVISED THAT THE SITUATION HAD REMAINED QUIET IN SEPTEMBER IN THEIR AOS. ARVN 1ST DIVISION COMMANDER, BGEN LE VAN THAN, REPORTED AN INCREASE IN ENEMY ACTIVITIES, WITH MORE THAN 200 INCIDENTS IN SEPTEMBER COMPARED WITH 177 IN AUGUST. MOST INCIDENTS WERE ATTACKS BY FIRE ON LINES FACING ENEMY UNITS. 1ST DIVISION CASUALTIES MORE THAN DOUBLED IN SEPTEMBER (336, INCLUDING 82 KIA) COMPARED TO AUGUST (157, INCLUDING 30 KIA). ARVN 2D DIVISION COMMANDER, TRAN VAN NHUT, REPORTED THAT ENEMY ACTIVITY REMAINED VERY LOW IN QUANG TIN. IN QUANG NGAI, ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN A REDUCTION IN ENEMY ACTIVITIES AGAINST REGULAR UNITS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF SEPTEMBER, THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN ACTIONS AGAINST RF/PF UNITS. NHUT EXPECTS THE ENEMY TO RELY UPON LOCAL FORCES IN AN EFFORT TO EXPAND HIS AREAS OF CONTROL, PARTICULARLY IN NORTHERN QUANG NGAI. HE BELIEVES MILITARY ACTIVITY WILL INCREASE IN THE QUE SON AREA DURING THE COMING MONTH.

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ACTION EA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 17232

7. THE DIVISION COMMANDERS INCLUDED IN THEIR LENGTHY PRESENTATIONS OF TROOP STRENGTH, TRAINING PROGRAMS, AND

DIVISION RESPONSIBILITIES A RECITATION OF CURRENT PROBLEMS. THE SHORTAGE OF SPARE PARTS WAS A RECURRENT THEME, HIGHLIGHTED BY THE MARINE, 1ST, AND 3D DIVISION COMMANDERS. BGEN THAN OF THE 1ST DIVISION SAID HE HAD 100 TRUCKS UNSERVICEABLE BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF SPARE PARTS, AND REQUESTED THAT HIS POL ALLOCATIONS BE INCREASED. THAN ALSO COMPLAINED THAT SOME OF HIS TROOPS HAD NOT BEEN PAID FOR AS LONG AS TWO MONTHS, AND REQUESTED MR-1 HEADQUARTERS ASSISTANCE IN ARRANGING R&R LEAVES FOR THE MEN WHO, IN HIS VIEW, HAVE BEEN ON THE EXPOSED FRONT LINES FOR TOO LONG. SEVERAL COMMANDERS REQUESTED ADDITIONAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING PONCHOS FOR THE APPROACHING RAINY SEASON, AND SHOVELS AND PICKS FOR DIGGING TRENCHES. MARINE COMMANDER LAN WAS ESPECIALLY FRANK IN DISCUSSING HIS DIFFICULTIES. HE CITED MALARIA AS A PROBLEM IN HIS AO, AND SAID HE IS ATTEMPTING TO COMBAT IT BY FORCING HIS MEN TO TAKE PREVENTIVE PILLS AND BY ROTATING TROOPS BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS AND LOWLANDS. LAN ALSO COMMENTED THAT MORALE WAS NOT AS HIGH AMONG SOME OF HIS MARINES AS IN THE PAST. HE ATTRIBUTED THIS DECLINE TO TROOP CONCERN ABOUT ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS THEIR FAMILIES ARE SUFFERING.

8. THE MR-1 OPERATIONS OFFICER, COLONEL NGHIN, BRIEFED THE
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CONFERENCE ON THE REORGANIZATION OF THE RANGERS. AFTER THE REORGANIZATION, WHICH BEGAN SEPTEMBER 1 AND SHOULD BE CONCLUDED BY DECEMBER 30, MR-1 RANGER STRENGTH WILL BE INCREASED TO FOUR RANGER GROUPS (THE 11TH, 12TH, 14TH AND 15TH) COMPOSED OF THREE BATTALIONS EACH. ONE GROUP WILL BE STATIONED NORTH, AND TWO SOUTH, OF THE HAI VAN PASS, AND ONE WILL BE KEPT IN RESERVE.

9. THE MR-1 ARTILLERY COMMANDER PRESENTED A NEW CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR THE COORDINATED DESTRUCTION OF KEY ENEMY POSITIONS AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT EMBLEMMENTS "IN THE EVENT OF AN ENEMY CEASEFIRE VIOLATION". (WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PLAN WHICH WE SHALL SUBMIT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE).

10. IN HIS REMARKS AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE BRIEFINGS,
GENERAL TRUONG MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS:

A. HE EXPECTS NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE ENEMY SITUATION AND POLICIES BETWEEN NOW AND THE END OF THE YEAR. HE FORESEES A CONTINUATION OF NVA/VC EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR AGENT NETWORK IN THE LOWLANDS, EXPAND BASE AREAS IN THE MOUNTAINS, AND INFILTRATE ADDITIONAL WAR MATERIEL AND PERSONNEL. AT THE SAME TIME, THE ENEMY WILL ATTEMPT TO IMPROVE THE POSITION OF THE NLF SO THAT WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY IS FAVORABLE HE CAN LAUNCH SURPRISE ATTACKS AS AT TET IN 1968.

B. WITHIN MR-1 THE RESULTS ACHIEVED ON THE GVN SIDE DURING THE THIRD QUARTER OF 1973 GENERALLY HAVE BEEN SATISFACTORY. THERE HAS BEEN PROGRESS IN TERRITORIAL SECURITY, IMPROVEMENT IN SOME UNITS, AND PROGRESS IN RTV AND RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS. OBJECTIVES FOR THE 4TH QUARTER OF 1973 REMAIN UNCHANGED.

C. DEFICIENCIES WHICH REMAIN ARE A CONSEQUENCE OF LAZINESS, LACK OF INITIATIVE, AND FAILURE TO ADJUST TO THE CHANGED POST-CEASEFIRE SITUATION. THE SITUATION IS CHANGING ALL THE TIME. THERE ARE NO LONGER U.S. FORCES IN VIETNAM, YET SOME COMMANDERS CONTINUE TO USE THE SAME OLD PROCEDURES AND TACTICS. SOME ARE EXCESSIVELY DEPENDENT ON MATERIAL GOODS, AND MUST LEARN TO DO WITHOUT SOME OF THE FACILITIES WHICH USED TO BE AVAILABLE. COMMANDERS MUST BE FLEXIBLE IN DEPLOYMENT OF THEIR
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FORCES, SHOULD DEVELOP NEW TACTICS, AND SHOULD SEEK TO SOLVE THEIR OWN PROBLEMS. THE CURRENT PERIOD OF RELATIVE QUIET MUST BE UTILIZED TO STRENGTHEN AND CONSOLIDATE POSITIONS. WITH REGARD TO DEPLOYMENT, PARTICULARLY IN QUANG NGAI AND IN SOME AREAS OF QUANG NAM, LARGER FORCES COULD BE EMPLOYED INSTEAD OF THE SMALL GROUPS CURRENTLY BEING ENGAGED. DIVISIONS AND SECTORS MUST SUPERVISE THE OPERATIONS OF THE LOWER LEVEL UNITS TO SEE THAT THEY ARE USED PROPERLY.

D. IN OCTOBER, I CORPS FORWARD COMMANDER, LAM QUANG THI, PLANS TO CONDUCT A FIELD EXERCISE TO DEPLOY RESERVE FORCES. REPRESENTATIVES FROM JGS MAY BE INVITED TO OBSERVE. QUANG TIN-QUANG NGAI SECTOR SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER CONDUCTING FIELD EXERCISES.

E. DIVISION COMMANDERS SHOULD VISIT THEIR MEN WHO ARE IN EXPOSED POSITIONS. THE MEN SHOULD BE KEPT BUSY.

F. RESERVE FORCES ARE BEING COMMITTED TOO SOON. COMMANDERS MUST MAINTAIN A STRONG RESERVE. ONLY IN EXCEPTIONAL CASES, SUCH AS HIGHWAY #1 BEING CUT OFF, SHOULD RESERVES BE USED.

G. SPECIAL ATTENTION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO KEEPING HIGHWAY #1 OPEN TO INSURE THE FLOW OF SUPPLIES TO THE NORTHERN PROVINCES. THE NAM MO BRIDGE MUST BE CAREFULLY DEFENDED; WITHOUT IT, THE NORTHERN PROVINCES COULD BE CUT OFF. POPPLE
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